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NEW SHOOTS FROM OLD ROOTS: TE POU AHUREI
AS A LEARNING FRAMEWORK

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NEW SHOOTS FROM OLD ROOTS: TE POU AHUREI AS A LEARNING FRAMEWORK

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INTRODUCTION

As three kaiako working in the School of Media Arts at the Kirikiriroa campus of Te Pūkenga, we are intensely aware of how Eurocentric bias has historically and culturally framed the teaching and learning styles of not only the creative arts, but also within a polytechnic setting. Some of us worry that embedding mātauranga Māori is easier said than done, not the least of which because most of the School are non-Māori. Others of us worry that the competing tensions within Te Pūkenga will mean that it will struggle to be more than “policy rhetoric” (Jones, 2017, p. 181). In order to make “Māori ways of being and doing as normal” (Citizen, 2020, p. 82) for non-Māori as well as Māori in a tertiary educational setting, we embarked on our own journeys first and through kōrero have brought them together. What follows outlines the beginnings of a learning framework called Te Pou Ahurei, which we believe is a valuable tool for meeting the expectations of tertiary educational institutions in a way that is meaningful for our students (taura) and represents our shared partnership values of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

THE SITUATION

Polytechnics have traditionally been described as being places that provide “professional and vocational education and training” (Ministry of Education, 2022) to achieve “advanced technical skills” (Tertiary Education Commission, 2018, p. 3). According to the Education and Training Act 2020 (‘the Act’), this definition appears unchanged in that Te Pūkenga remains a place of “vocational, foundation, and degree-level or higher education and training” that is designed to meet the needs of “learners, industries, employers, and communities” (s.315). The Act now makes explicit that one of its purposes is the statutory requirement that it “honours Te Tiriti o Waitangi and supports Māori-Crown relationships” (s.4(d)).

For those of us working at the ‘coal-face’ with taura, the directive to “to improve outcomes for Māori learners and Māori communities in collaboration with Māori and iwi partners, hapū, and interested persons or bodies” (s.315(f) of the Act) is now made clear. What is less certain is precisely how this is to be achieved for those working in the creative arts and for those whose role is to help foster critical thinking skills. We are faced with a multitude of complexities. Foremost amongst them is identifying that whilst the charter of Te Pūkenga identifies industry as meaning enterprises of two or more which use “the same or similar inputs and methods of production to produce the same or similar products; or the same or similar methods to provide the same or similar services” (s.10), this is not in itself the same as honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi, particularly concerning the Māori version of Article 2, which guarantees Tino rangatiratanga. In other words, regardless of individual interpretations, these directives can be visualised as a Venn diagram—with one circle representing Te Ao Māori and the other representing industry. There is obviously an overlapping portion where both these realms meet. However, similarly, there are also large parts of each realm where they do not meet, where different understandings arise from each cultural knowledge framework, not the least of which is entirely different metaphysical foundations

with their attendant understandings of what or does not constitute knowledge, who or what has agency in the world, what strategies are tika (correct), what ensures that both tauira and kaiako act with pono (integrity), and a whole host of cultural differences that are not immediately apparent within the Act. For instance, nested within the Act's emphasis on industry are foundational assumptions about what constitutes work, with an attendant privileging of employment and work-based training. Work-based training can occur with someone who is identified as an industry member, which is defined as a "person who employs persons who work in that industry or a self-employed person in that industry" (s.10).

THE NEED

The idea for Te Pou Ahurei was born from a personal need, obligation and responsibility that one of the authors (Toni Herangi) had—and continues to have—for herself, her tūpuna and mokopuna, to ensure that the ways in which she chooses to represent and portray mātauranga Māori within an academic setting are done with integrity and respect. As Toni describes it:

I will be honest and say that initially accepting this role under the guise of 'A Mātauranga Māori Expert' truly terrified me. Culturally there is a huge amount of pressure to ensure that the way I choose to share and invite participants to engage with mātauranga Māori is done in an uplifting and culturally appropriate way that secures the place of mātauranga Māori for future generations. As an approach to teaching, I suppose Te Pou Ahurei is my way of endeavouring to confirm and reaffirm the value mātauranga Māori has. Please understand I am not suggesting that the initial idea of a cultural framework is mine and mine alone. I am simply sharing a method I have further developed from already existing concepts that stem from Te Ao Māori.

In this way, the authors of this article would like to recognise that Te Pou Ahurei is born both out of Toni Herangi's needs as a kaiako, out of the indigenous knowledge and ways of being that Te Ao Māori fosters and has also grown out of our teaching practice and obligations to meet the needs of our tauira.

Underlying Te Pou Ahurei are two core concepts that stem from Te Ao Māori: kaitiakitanga and whakapapa. The concept of kaitiakitanga refers to the idea of guardianship, of protecting or being the protector of something precious. It involves responsibilities and obligations that will cause us all to be accountable; these accountabilities are both inherent and cultural. In the context of Te Pou Ahurei, kaitiakitanga reminds both kaiako and tauira to explore cultural bodies of knowledge with integrity and respect. Practising the principle of kaitiakitanga can be challenging, but also rewarding; it is not as simple as simply thinking about how we use this knowledge. It is also about considering the types of impact our interactions with this knowledge will have and in turn creating strategies of application to help promote a positive outcome for all.

Whakapapa is commonly understood as connections through genealogical descent; another understanding refers to processes of doing or steps applied to help fulfil an outcome. When we utilise whakapapa as an underlying concept in Te Pou Ahurei, we mean whakapapa is not just about where a person is from or whom a person is related to or descends from, but also about ways of doing. It is about being aware of how we use and share knowledge, how we build connections and understanding and how we re-interpret that knowledge. As Toni puts it:

This understanding is shaped by my upbringing, fostered by the lived experiences I was privileged to have with my grandparents. The way they lived, the way they taught me, and how the things I experienced moulded my perspective. The way my grandparents passed on their knowledge moulded the way I view the world; it has shaped the person I am today. These lived experiences reinforce the idea that 'what happens here affects what happens in the future', meaning that how we use knowledge today will shape the knowing of tomorrow.

We believe that because the knowledge we cultivate with our taura filters down to our mokopuna (descendants) to shape the way they view and experience the world, it is our responsibility to approach education in a way that reinforces—for both kaiako and taura—kaitiakitanga and whakapapa. Kaitiakitanga and whakapapa are the guiding principles for Te Pou Ahurei because our responsibility is to help taura identify or establish their own kaupapa, as they learn.

THE NAME

Te Pou Ahurei has two components: Pou references the traditionally carved Māori posts that sit within a whareniui; these pou serve as part of the structural support system that helps to hold up the roof of the whareniui. The word ahurei references processes and protocols that relate to the planting of kūmara. In Te Pou Ahurei, the pou represents a structural system or framework that fosters and supports the educational development and learning journey of taura, whilst ahurei references taura as being the kūmara or seed. The kūmara is nourished and sustained within the earth that it has been planted in, which in an educational setting refers to the knowledge kaiako provide to foster and nurture taura learning. The pou is therefore a support structure that guides, directs, and informs that nourishment.

To extend the metaphor of the name, Te Pou Ahurei offers two things. Firstly, the pou is a structure in which taura can embed their values to support their own studies. Secondly, ahurei references the processes and protocols implemented to ensure the holistic delivery and nourishment of student-centred learning. This learning is constructed and developed through reciprocal and meaningful strategies and educational experiences, with a purposeful intention that taura will carry these experiences with them throughout their learning journey to eventually become creative and independent thinkers.

BEGINNINGS

Te Pou Ahurei was initially an assessment for the Mātauranga Māori Mahinga Toi class, which is part of our Bachelor of Contemporary Arts degree. It is a way in which we can recognise the positionality of our taura, explicitly ask them to identify their values and then use those values as a reference point for engaging with various concepts. In this way one could think of Te Pou Ahurei as a strategy for teaching a student-centred and culturally responsive class.

Since its initial introduction as an assessment for contemporary arts taura learning about mātauranga Māori through an exploration of toi Māori, Te Pou Ahurei has evolved into a learning framework that has been adopted in the delivery of other several classes.

RETHINKING ASSESSMENT

Applying Te Pou Ahurei beyond the Mātauranga Māori Mahinga Toi class allowed us to ask, with our taura, what exactly are we aiming for when we attempt to foster a sense of professional ethics in the creative arts? Asking this question prompted us to see an opportunity to rethink how we assess, and in the process co-activate, the ethical dimension. We believe the interrelating complexities found within the twin directives of Te Pūkenga and the technological disruptions of artificial intelligence and automation, can only be met by radically rethinking our teaching delivery methods and how we approach assessment to meet our learning outcomes. We therefore identified a common assumption within tertiary teaching and learning practices of the creative arts: the Eurocentric tradition of separating theory and practice classes from each other. To an extent, it is unsurprising that the same liberal humanist philosophies that informed the emergence of tertiary institutions, such as polytechnics, have equally presumed the universality of those Cartesian divisions between nature and

culture, body and mind, human and nonhuman, and so on. Similarly, communications media theory assumed, before Māori-Indigenous and post-humanist critique at least, the universal applicability of dividing between intangible ideas and, by extension, representations, and tangible things, including practices with those things, in the world.

We therefore wondered that if we sought to facilitate 'student-centred teaching and learning' about the practice-led creative arts, could we use teaching and learning and assessments that themselves use practice-led creative arts approaches in a participatory and performative manner? Extending Te Pou Ahurei into other classes, we asked the question, is it possible to assess critical thinking through creative arts practice itself? If the core fundamentals of critical thinking are comprehension, synthesis and practical applicability, then can we weave together classroom learning, taura reflection and assessment, without, for example, the need to write essays? Furthermore, can we do this in a way grounded in collaboration with Māori, iwi partners and hapū? Te Pou Ahurei presents a way that helps to foster critical thinking skills in taura, so that they can determine for themselves what is the best course of action to take in relation to their own lived experiences.

THE FRAMEWORK

Returning to our hypothetical Venn diagram, we can now see that Te Pou Ahurei forms the lines that structure the circles themselves; it is the foundation for growth in all areas in a way that aligns with kaupapa Māori values and, without requiring mātauranga Māori to explicitly sit within the category of 'industry', recognises both the soft skills and the bodies of knowledge that facilitate the growth of a student's capabilities. As an indigenous learning framework, Te Pou Ahurei was born out of a local need to honour the positionality of taura, to recognise from where their creative practice speaks, and in so doing, whom they might address. It starts by inviting taura to consider their position, not just in space and time, but in other dimensions such as their own cultural and personal values. These self-reflections are woven together as an evolving live document, which taura bring with them throughout the duration of their tertiary education journey. By continually asking what their values are, taura have a point of contact to engage with new content and discourse and are able to relationally contextualise this information. Taura are therefore not only engaging with different bodies of knowledge in a meaningful way, but actively experience how these bodies of knowledge exist within different cultural frameworks.

THE STAGES OF TE POU AHUREI

Te Kūmara – Taura start by identifying their values, exploring their identity, and/or identifying their interests. Te Kūmara represents the taura, as well as the knowledge and lived experiences they carry with them. From a conceptual Te Ao Māori lens, Te Kūmara is represented by the concept of kākano, or the unrealised potential of a seed.

Te Whenua – Kaiako share knowledge that taura can connect, compare and make comparisons with, within the Te Kūmara stage. Te Whenua represents the earth that nourishes and sustains the kūmara. The earth is nurtured and enriched by the bodies of knowledge kaiako introduce and encourage taura to explore, which in turn continues to foster the nourishment of Te Kūmara. Through a conceptual Te Ao Maori lens, Te Whenua is represented by the concept of mātauranga, a living breathing intergenerational body of knowledge.

Te Pou – Taura weave together this knowledge to construct a framework. This framework will support taura during the development of a project, guiding and informing the decisions they make as they progress towards an academic or creative output. This stage is the bulk of the assessment. Te Pou represents the emerging framework taura weave together by fusing the strands of knowledge the kaiako imparts to them with the strands of knowledge they carry with them. Here, kaiako create opportunities for taura to engage in meaningful learning experiences that are both student-centred and individualised. Through a conceptual Te Ao Maori lens, Te Pou

is represented by the concept of whakapapa, which is reflected in the developmental stages or processes of doing that kaiako and taura progress through together, during the construction of emerging taura frameworks.

Aka Kūmara – Taura are processing, analysing, and interpreting knowledge that has been shared. Taura will continue to interpret and re-interpret what they have learnt, and this may potentially cause taura to consider how their new learning can be applied to other areas. In this way Te Pou Ahurei has the potential to be a foundation on which other learning (the Aka Kūmara) can be scaffolded and used as the starting point of other assessments, projects, and further growth. Aka Kūmara represents the progressions of learning, the development of insight, the establishment of understanding, and the evolution of perspectives that taura experience through meaningful learning engagements. Aka Kūmara represents the growth taura experience when they are taught using strategies and approaches that foster opportunities where meaningful, relevant, and insightful learning experiences can take place. Through a conceptual Te Ao Maori lens, Aka Kūmara is represented by the concept of mauri. This mauri is reflected in the growth and learning of taura.

EXAMPLES OF TE POU AHUREI IN PRACTICE

There are four classes where we have applied Te Pou Ahurei; the first is our Mātauranga Māori Mahinga Toi class, the second is a media/cultural theory class called Critical Methods, and the other two are contemporary art project classes. All of these classes follow the structure of Te Pou Ahurei whilst still allowing us to deliver the required content, regardless of its alignment with Te Ao Māori.

MĀTAURANGA MAORI MAHINGA TOI

Mātauranga Māori Mahinga Toi is a contemporary art class in which taura learn about and engage in mātauranga Maori concepts through Toi Māori practices. Te Pou Ahurei was first utilised in this class—what we present here is the second iteration of it.

Te Kūmara – The starting point for Mātauranga Māori Mahinga Toi starts from pēpehā as a strategy for establishing one's position. During this initial development, taura then identify the values and principles that guide their day-to-day activities.

Te Whenua – The kaiako introduces Te Ao Māori concepts, such as those within Toi Māori practices, which taura discuss in alignment with their established values.

Te Pou – Taura create a visual anchor to present to the class, with a written description of their values and pēpehā, which will inform their final output. For this class the output was a pair of tukutuku panels that visually illustrated two aspects from their pēpehā.

Aka Kūmara – Taura re-enter the Te Pou Ahurei to foster further growth.

In Mātauranga Māori Mahinga Toi we found that implementing Te Pou Ahurei empowers taura to interact with mātauranga Māori in relevant, meaningful, and validating ways. It allows for engagement with Te Ao Māori, specifically mātauranga Māori and toi Māori, in a culturally appropriate and safe manner. The dialogue between one's values and how they are positioned in relation to values within Te Ao Māori, fosters opportunities for taura to engage with the course content in a way that is relevant to their own lived experience, contextualising newly constructed knowledge in relation to their values and to better understand their own motives. The Aka Kūmara component of the course asks taura how their Te Pou Ahurei might guide and support their creative practice in the future and empowers them to take responsibility for their studies through the principle of kaitiakitanga, as taura know that what they do in one class forms the foundation for the following classes.

INDEPENDENT PROJECT

Independent Project is a contemporary art class where taura are asked to revisit or extend a previous project from the contemporary arts degree. This class was the first time Te Pou Ahurei was used outside of a mātauranga Māori-focused class.

Aka Kūmara – The knowledge and new learning taura carry with them from the Mātauranga Māori Mahinga Toi class.

Te Kūmara – The starting point for Independent Project starts with identifying a project they would like to explore, combined with some of the values they explored in their first engagement with Te Pou Ahurei.

Te Whenua – Kaiako introduce concepts and points of reference to support their proposed project.

Te Pou – Taura write a project description, a final output, and then an update of the values related to the project's learnings.

By using the written framework of values from the previous Mātauranga Māori Mahinga Toi class, taura were able to consider their project's direction and reflect upon its completion. It opened up discussion about whether their work represented their values as creatives and if representing or practising these values is what they wanted to do in their work.

CRITICAL METHODS

This subject aims to foster critical thinking skills and is usually referred to as a 'theory class.' It is a compulsory subject for all taura of the School of Media Arts at the Kirikiriroa campus of Te Pūkenga. This year we utilised the structure of Te Pou Ahurei as a method for contextualising what is known as 'contemporary theory.' The trajectory of Critical Methods begins with ideas around world view, then continues with the making of meaning, and finally with the various forms of modernism(s). Following the principles of Te Pou Ahurei, in week one, we started the session with taura identifying their values and positionality through asking them to write their own version of a creative manifesto. As the course progressed through different topics, taura were able to rewrite different versions of their manifesto, so that they could compare their original values with the discourses that they encountered.

Aka Kūmara – The knowledge and new learning taura carry with them from the Independent Projects class.

Te Kūmara – Taura explored manifesto writing as a way to outline their values.

Te Whenua – The manifesto became a reference point that taura could then use to compare the values of various discourses delivered by Kaiako.

Te Pou – Although Te Pou Ahurei is not a part of the assessment in Critical Methods, it informs our delivery. The Te Pou stage comprises in-class activities; for example, we co-construct a participatory workbook with taura.

One key difference between our Mātauranga Māori Mahinga Toi class and the Critical Methods class is that the former has both the documentation of Te Pou Ahurei and practical work as assessable components. Critical Methods however appears to lack the opportunity for kaitiakitanga because the day-to-day work is not assessed in the same way as it is in project-based learning. To resolve this in the context of a theory class which uses only essay writing and presentations as a form of assessment, we used a participatory workbook that invited taura to engage in the workbook's own creation. This started with us writing and illustrating a basic version that taura could then make their own contributions to. It is not an assessment but rather an in-class resource accompanied

by in-class activities, which invites taura to engage in the workbook's creation through marginalia, manifesto writing, and illustration, all packaged within a zine format. We provide taura with a skeleton and an overview, which they subsequently actively string together. At the start of the semester, the zine is presented to them with the promise that by the end of the course it will look very different to how it currently looks and will help provide the course materials for taura for next iteration of the course to start with. Kaitiakitanga is therefore actively fostered through enabling multi-semester tuakana-teina relationships.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

Te Pou Ahurei is a strategy for activating a sense of kaitiakitanga, beyond its usual reference of guardianship, towards its more nuanced inclusion of accountability. Kaitiakitanga in this sense reminds us to act with integrity and respect when exploring cultural knowledge systems or any body of knowledge. Participants who conduct their interactions in this way are present, conscious, and purposeful with regards to how they use these knowledges. These interactions are conducted responsibly, suggesting that participants are consciously thinking about their interactions and the impact their interactions might have on the body of knowledge they are exploring.

Within Te Ao Māori, accountability, through a whakapapa approach which references the continual reinterpretation of intergenerational bodies of knowledge, with each new generation, helps to ensure the preservation of mātauranga for future generations. The mātauranga our tūpuna fostered shaped and forms the knowing we have today. The mātauranga we foster today will be the knowledge of our mokopuna tomorrow, shaping their perspectives, perceptions, and knowledge and determining how they see the world. Thus, we must be mindful of how we use our mātauranga. Perhaps Te Pou Ahurei is a way of ensuring that the pono (integrity) of our mātauranga stays intact to guide our mokopuna, who are the tūpuna of tomorrow.

Toni Herangi is a kaiako and artist who descends from the Tainui waka. She has a Master's in Media Arts from Wintec and is working towards her PhD. Toni has spent countless hours developing and refining her understanding of traditional Toi Māori practices, and is now working for Te Pūkenga, Kirikiriroa campus, where she is sharing her knowledge and skills with both taura and kaiako.

Mason Holloway is a kaiako and artist from Kirikiriroa. After completing a BMA(Hons) in painting in New Zealand, he completed an MFA in Experimental Art at the Tianjin Academy of Fine Art, China. He is currently an educator for Te Pūkenga, Kirikiriroa campus. His primary research interest is applying Luhmann's systems theory in a creative arts context.

Joe Citizen is a collaborative practice-led creative-arts researcher mainly interested in speculative metaphysics located at the intercultural hyphen space (Fine, 1994, p. 72) and how this applies to Māori and Pākehā ways of knowing and being. Joe Citizen is particularly interested in relational emergence explored through the creation of immersive interactive installations, using sound, lighting, and transcoded data from environmental sensors. Citizen's work has relevance to the fields of Māori-Pākehā relations, post-humanist and new materialist critique, aesthetics, and contemporary digital theory. For further information, please contact Joe.Citizen@wintec.ac.nz

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